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Strategies to Lower Information Technology Employee Voluntary Turnover

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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2019

Abstract

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MS, Colorado Technical University, 2009

BS, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

For information technology (IT) professionals, the average turnover rate of voluntary employees is approximately 21.5% and occurs in fewer than 5 years. The purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies IT outsourcing business executives used to retain key IT employees in the New England region of the United States. Three IT business leaders from a single organization were selected to participate because they had implemented strategies to retain key IT employees. Herzberg's 2-factor theory of motivation was used as the conceptual framework for this doctoral study. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and review of company policies and personnel handbooks. Clarke and Braun's thematic analysis was used for data analysis, including assembling the data, creating codes from the data, compiling codes to generate themes, and interpreting and presenting themes. Member checking and triangulation processes helped increase study validity and reliability. Three themes emerged from the study: building personal relationships, creating positive company culture, and investing in employee training. The findings of this study may help IT leaders increase employee retention by focusing on work relationships, company culture, and employee training. Findings may contribute to social change by helping IT leaders so they can be civically engaged and address issues of public concern by increasing community volunteering, participating in charitable activities and philanthropy, and becoming politically active through petitioning and collaborating with local authorities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this page to the Holy Spirit for giving me the gifts of perseverance to complete this great challenge. This page is also dedicated to my wife, Daina, and two daughters, Valeria and Natalia, for their support throughout the years so I can achieve my goal.

Acknowledgments

To my family for their unconditional love and support during this journey. I also want to thank my mentor, Dr. Ronald Black, for sharing his knowledge and provided guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Irene Williams for helping me along the way to my goal. Also, thanks to all my study participants who took time from their busy schedule and answered all my questions.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

This section of the study includes a brief discussion of the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the nature of the study, the conceptual framework, and a review of the literature. In the background, I provide a high-level context for the premise of the study. In the literature review, I present an analysis and synthesis of contemporary scholarly work on this subject.

Background of the Problem

Globally, corporations have adopted permanent layoffs as a strategy to meet their financial goals (Rombaut & Guerry, 2018). This trend has been effective for a sufficient number of years so that now the impacts of layoffs on the families of the layoff victims are visible. Hilger (2016) noted how the families of layoff victims coincided with reduced family income and reduced college enrollment trends within their families. Employees have accepted layoffs as a permanent management strategy and have resorted to voluntary turnover more frequently to make use of any better opportunities available to sustain their families (Hilger, 2016). These trends are a challenge for human resource management, especially in the information technology (IT) sector where managers find it difficult to retain a talent pool (Huang & Zhang, 2016). I designed this study to explore the challenges IT managers and leaders face in balancing the need to carry out imposed workforce reductions to meet financial goals while retaining the talent pool required to meet their production goals.

Problem Statement

The IT turnover rate is costing organizations substantial amounts of money to hire and train employees to replace them (Lo, 2015). On average, for IT professionals, voluntary employee turnover is approximately 21.5% and occurs in less than 5 years (Huang & Zhang, 2016). The general business problem was IT outsourcing business executives are not able to retain highly skilled employees in the IT industry, which results in high IT employee turnover. The specific business problem was that some IT outsourcing business executives lack strategies to retain key IT employee talent.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies IT outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent. The population of this study consisted of three IT outsourcing business executives located in Massachusetts who had developed and implemented successful retention strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover. The results of this study contribute to social change by assisting companies achieve high employee retention so they may contribute to civic engagement and help identify and address issues of public concern by increasing community volunteering and participating in charitable activities and philanthropy by collaborating with local authorities.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative approach and collected data through semistructured interviews. Researchers who use a qualitative methodology attempt to explore phenomena when there is little existing literature related to the phenomena

(Luckman, 2016). A qualitative methodology facilitates understanding of the phenomena through an examination of participants' beliefs, perceptions, experiences, opinions, and attitudes using narrative-based data (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The use of a qualitative methodology in this study may enhance the understanding of the strategies for retaining key IT employee talent. Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because I focused on exploring successful strategies by collecting in-depth data from a small sample of participants without the objective of generalizability (see McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because statistical analyses for hypotheses related to relationships or differences between variables were not examined in this study (see Annansingh & Howell, 2016). A mixed method approach comprises qualitative and quantitative methods to broaden the understanding of the phenomenon by seeking additional information to address the problem (Bazeley, 2015). The mixed method approach was not suitable for this study because I did not use quantitative data to test hypotheses assessing relationships or differences between variables.

I employed a single case study design in this study. Using a case study design allowed me to gather data directly from business executives who address the issue of retaining key IT employee talent within their organization. According to Yin (2018), researchers use case study designs to explore a current phenomenon in its real-world context. A case study design was appropriate for this study because my focus was to explore how business executives retain key IT talent by examining successful strategies they have employed to retain employees (see Yin, 2018). Phenomenology was not appropriate for this study because phenomenological researchers focus on the essence of a phenomenon from the participants' lived experiences and points of view (see Song, 2017). Ethnography was not suitable for this study because researchers use the ethnographic design to explore the behavior of a group's culture in natural settings (see Dahles & Susilowati, 2015). A narrative inquiry approach was not appropriate because I did not focus on participants' chronological narratives to understand the phenomena (see Clandinin, 2006; Ozanne, Strauss, & Corbin, 1992). Finally, a grounded theory approach was not suitable because I did not intend to evaluate the data to develop theories describing the nature of the phenomena (see Moustakas, 1994; Rasmussen, Chu, Akinsulure-Smith, & Keatley, 2013).

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do outsource business executives use to retain key IT employee talent?

Interview Questions

1. Based on your experience, how does IT employee turnover affect a company's service to the client?
2. What strategies do you use to mitigate voluntary employee turnover of the highly skilled IT talent pool?
3. Which of these strategies helped most to improve employee retention?
4. How effective have these strategies been?

5. What were the key barriers to implementing your successful strategies for mitigating voluntary turnover among the highly skilled IT talent pool in your organization?
6. How did you address the key barriers to implementing your successful strategies for mitigating voluntary turnover among the highly skilled IT talent pool in your organization?
7. What other information can you share about your successful strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover?

Conceptual Framework

Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory served as the conceptual framework for this exploratory, single case study. According to Herzberg, some job factors result in satisfaction, while other job factors help to prevent dissatisfaction (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). The primary components of the two-factor theory are motivators and hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Motivators that result in job satisfaction include achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction and include company policy, working conditions, supervision, interpersonal relations, money, status, and job security (Herzberg, 1959). Because of the focuses on motivators and hygiene factors, the two-factor theory was a suitable framework to explore how business leaders retain IT talent. Company leaders who understand an employee's source of job dissatisfaction are in a better position to create strategies that may help with employee turnover behavior than those who do not. An IT outsourcing company manager may notice that his or her IT employees are highly dissatisfied. In this case, the manager's knowledge of the factors that lead to satisfaction can prevent dissatisfaction and help improve the IT employee's work environment. In addition, if a manager recognizes that the IT employees are not, in general, dissatisfied, then leadership can concentrate their efforts on motivational factors.

Definitions

Employee retention: The need and strategies to keep talented employees (Deery & Jago, 2015).

Extrinsic motivation: The desire to complete a task driven by external factors such as incentives or avoiding punishment (Kuvaas, Buch, Weibel, Dysvik, & Nerstad, 2017).

Intrinsic motivation: The willingness to perform a task driven by internal factors such as employee satisfaction (Kuvaas et al., 2017).

Involuntary turnover: Situations in which employees have no choice in their termination(e.g., employer-initiated dismissal due to nonperformance; Huang & Zhang, 2016).

IT talent: An IT employee who demonstrates high technical potential, ability, and a commitment to being successful (Naim & Lenka, 2017).

Motivation: The reasons individuals have for behaving in specific ways (Sanjeev & Surya, 2016).

Voluntary turnover: The type of termination initiated by the employee for different reasons; it can be somewhat predicted and addressed in human resources (Rombaut & Guerry, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions of a study are aspects the researcher has no control over but are assumed to be true (Ernst & Albers, 2017). I made two assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that company leaders would openly share the challenges and successes they experienced when attempting to retain IT staff. My other assumption was that participants would answer the interview questions honestly and to the best of their knowledge. To encourage open and honest dialogue regarding challenges and successes, interviews were conducted in a private setting free of intrusion or distractions.

Limitations

Limitations are the shortcomings of a study that can influence the results (Ernst & Albers, 2017). I identified two limitations to this study. The first limitation was that participants may have provided vague responses to the interview questions because of stress, personal biases, or fear related to their disclosures. The second limitation was that participants may not have remembered the details of the current business strategies associated with voluntary IT employee turnover.

Delimitations

Delimitations involve delineating the scope or limits of the study to narrow and define the focus of the study (Ernst & Albers, 2017). There were two delimitations in this study. The first delimitation was that the sample only included participants from one IT outsourcing company in Massachusetts. The other delimitation was that all participants held a leadership position in the company.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

One critical issue for IT outsourcing executives is how to increase IT employee retention rates. It is important for company leaders to recognize and understand the impetus surrounding voluntary IT employee turnover to mitigate it. The results of this exploratory, single case study can inform business leaders who desire to lower voluntary IT employee turnover. The results of this study can help business leaders to (a) identify and implement effective strategies to help lower employee turnover, (b) reduce the negative effects on daily operations, (c) mitigate costs to hire and train new employees, and (d) maintain business profitability.

Implications for Social Change

High employee retention may lead to a stronger IT industry and better IT service. High employee retention could lead to enhanced IT services for individual consumers and businesses. The increased retention of IT professionals may also provide employees with steady income, potentially enhancing their financial situations and the quality of their lives.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, single case study was to investigate strategies IT outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent. The literature review is organized into the following three sections: (a) motivational theory, (b) factors of employee turnover, and (c) the IT workforce. Hertzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory, which served as the theoretical foundation for the study, is discussed in detail. I then review the extant literature on factors related to employee turnover in the IT industry.

Literature Search Strategy

My literature review of strategies IT outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent included peer-reviewed journals, seminal scholarly books, dissertations, and corporate and government reports, with the focus being on recent peer-reviewed articles. I conducted a comprehensive online search using the Walden University Library accessed through the online library portal and the University of Massachusetts Library Systems. Key terms used for the search included *information technology*, *IT*, *IT workforce*, *IT talent*, *employee turnover*, *involuntary turnover*, *voluntary turnover*, and *retention*. The databases searched and search tools used included Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, Google Scholar, SAGE, EBSCO Primary, and ERIC.

Table 1

Literature Review Reference Content

Reference type	Total	> 5 years	< 5 years	% < 5 years
Peer-reviewed journals	83	6	77	92.77%
Books	0	0	0	0.00%
Non-peer-reviewed journals	0	0	0	0.00%
Total	83	6	77	

Hertzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. According to Herzberg et al. (1959), some job factors result in satisfaction, and other job factors prevent dissatisfaction. The main areas that compose the two-factor theory are motivators and hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Motivator factors, such as achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement, result in job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors, such as company policy, working conditions, supervision, interpersonal relations, money, status, and job security, prevent dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is another motivation theory I considered for my study. However, applying the two-factor theory in a work setting seemed to be a better choice because Herzberg observed that employee job satisfaction and motivation directly influence workers to stay or leave their current jobs

(Herzberg et al., 1959). Maslow was more concerned with being motivated to obtain the basic necessities of life, such as food and shelter. Therefore, I used the two-factor theory as a lens through which to explain strategies outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent.

IT outsourcing leadership should be able to identify issues that impact IT employees to understand the triggers that make an employee resign, with the idea of developing strategies for reducing voluntary employee turnover (Nancarrow, 2015; Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015; Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). Nancarrow (2015) concentrated on job flexibility and suggested employers have a generic employee skill base and should provide training as necessary to increase company performance. Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) found a positive relationship between work environment and job satisfaction; however, their study population included various professions, including telecommunications, in a quantitative study, limiting the insight in regard to strategies within the IT sector. Sanjeev and Surya (2016) used Hertzberg's two-factor theory but employed a quantitative approach. My study differs from those of Nancarrow, Raziq and Maulabakhsh, and Sanjeev and Surya in that I used a qualitative approach to explore different strategies to retain employees and help the organization maintain or increase the quality of services and revenue. The qualitative method allowed me to interview and collect data from key executives currently working in the IT outsourcing industry.

Job Satisfaction

According to Lo (2015), employee turnover in the IT sector has been high since 1960. The percentage of IT employees' turnover has been above 15% since the beginning of the century (Lo, 2015). Lo speculated that jobs in the IT field will continue growing yearly at a 4% rate until the year 2020. Three factors can affect turnover behavior: individual, environmental, and organizational factors (Lo, 2015). Individual factors include individual characteristics, demographics, and dispositions (Kim & Park, 2017). Environmental factors include social and labor market influence (Naqvi & Bashir, 2015). Lastly, organizational factors include work environment, remuneration and incentives, fairness procedures and distribution, and human resources strategies (Naqvi & Bashir, 2015). Herzberg's two-factor theory may be used to study factors that relate to job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

Researchers have used Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) to study and explain turnover in various organizational settings (Alfayad & Mohd Arif, 2017; Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl, & Maude, 2017; Chileshe & Haupt, 2010; Jan, Raj, & Subramani, 2016, Zhou, Wang, Tsai, Xue, & Dong, 2017). The two-factor theory is composed of hygiene and motivation factors, and the combination of the two factors are crucial to achieving employee balance in the workplace leading to job satisfaction (Alfayad & Mohd Arif, 2017).

Sanjeev and Surya (2016) found that employee job satisfaction is an integral part of managerial responsibilities because company leadership must understand that employees' job satisfaction has been linked to business performance, increase retention, and business stability (Moon, 2016). Moon (2016) found that IT consultants in Korea lacked hygiene and motivation factors; therefore, employers needed to examine company policies and retention strategies to compete in the international IT consulting field and successfully retain IT talent. In their study, Alshmemri et al. (2017) found that hygiene factors led to job dissatisfaction but did not help increase employee job satisfaction levels. According to Alfayad and Mohd Arif (2017), employee hygiene factors are essential to minimize job dissatisfaction; however, motivational factors are equally important to increase employee job satisfaction, which may include individual factors.

Alfayad and Mohd Arif (2017) found that individuals who verbalize their concerns and opinions are likely to express more job satisfaction than those who stay quiet. This is because job environments that facilitate employees' opinions and concerns have a more significant impact on employee motivation, increasing job satisfaction (Alfayad & Mohd Arif, 2017). Employees and the quality of their work impact company performance; therefore, employees who perceive that company leadership values their feedback can help improve company performance in creative ways. Alfayad and Mohd Arif stated that ignoring employees' voices has a negative impact on job satisfaction. Alfayad and Mohd Arif used Herzberg's two-factor theory to study how employees who verbalize their opinions perceived job satisfaction.

Zhou et al. (2017) studied job satisfaction criteria and found that low job satisfaction weakens employee morale, directly affecting organizational commitment leading to high turnover rates. Akbar Ahmadi, Salamzadeh, Daraei, and Akbari (2012) found that organizational commitment had a positive effect on employee satisfaction, which was confirmed by Alfayad and Mohd Arif (2017) 5 years later. Individual factors are important to job satisfaction, which can lead to decreased turnover (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2015).

According to the job characteristics model, additional factors that increase job satisfaction are autonomy, job feedback, job and task significance, skill variety, and task identity (Hackman, 1980). Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2015) found that empowering employees increases job satisfaction and that organizations that limit the practice demonstrate their employees are not satisfied with their jobs, which leads to increased turnover. Empowering employees to make job decisions tends to increase productivity and creativity to help innovation, which can positively affect company performance (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2015). The relationship between leader and subordinate is also a major factor for job satisfaction; for example, a micromanaging supervisor or an autocratic leadership style can negatively impact workers' job satisfaction and influence employee turnover (Hoendervanger, Ernst, Albers, Mobach, & Van Yperen, 2018). Additionally, IT professionals may have the flexibility to work remotely, and some perceive the opportunity as positive. According to Xie, Ma, Zhou, and Tang (2018), some IT professionals are more successful than others coping with job exhaustion when working either from home or at the office. Therefore, working remotely or at the office can positively impact job satisfaction but can also increase job exhaustion because of unclear boundaries between personal and work life (Xie et al., 2018). Because individual factors relate to job satisfaction, it is important to consider demographics and dispositions as well.

According to Lo (2015), other factors that influence employee turnover include individual characteristics, such as demographics and dispositions. Demographics factors, such as gender, age, education, years of service, and income level, have a significant influence on employee turnover. Chakrabarti and Guha (2016) found that the Indian IT industry experiences high employee turnover among younger IT workers, and employees leaving for jobs with a higher salary is a leading reason. IT organizations across the world are demanding more skilled workers, and younger IT professionals have high expectations for remuneration, not only in terms of salary but also company brand, which are hygiene factors (Chakrabarti & Guha, 2016). Therefore, IT companies in India seem to be lacking a balance between hygiene and motivation factors. However, employees who are single fathers or mothers may carry increased family responsibilities and may be more likely to look for job opportunities that help them improve their wellbeing regardless of how they feel about their current employer (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). In Korea, according to Moon (2016), job satisfaction among IT consultants requires job training. The information age demands specific high-tech skills, and an employer who does not provide the necessary training to their IT consultants may suffer higher IT employee turnover.

The present qualitative case study confirmed quantitative study findings using Herzberg's two-factor theory. In addition, the results of this study may also provide more insight into the importance of the balance between hygiene and motivation factors to achieve increased employee job satisfaction. Supporting the importance of balancing hygiene and motivation factors may contradict the findings of Alshmemri et al. (2017) that motivational factors are more important than hygiene factors to achieve job satisfaction.

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors that influence employee turnover, include external social factors and the labor market (Lo, 2015). According to Lo (2015), external social factors may include lack of work-life balance and employee perceptions of fulfilling subjective norms, both of which can influence employee turnover. Chen, Brown, Bowers, and Chang (2015) found that a lack of balance between employees’ personal life and work is directly related to employee turnover. Companies cannot limit their strategies to lower employee turnover by focusing their efforts only to improve the work environment and ignoring employees’ lives outside their jobs (Lo, 2015). Chen et al. suggested that employee conflicts between work and family begin with working long hours, which does not allow for employees to participate in family activities. Employers must understand employees working long hours on a constant basis will create a conflict and negatively impact their best IT employees (Armstrong, Atkin-Plunk, & Wells, 2015).

Job commuting seems to be a factor that influences employees’ turnover intentions as well (Kim & Park, 2017). Many employees who have to drive to work daily are forced to spend money on gasoline, and some employees must also pay for daily parking. According to Kim and Park (2017), the time and money employees expend commuting contributes to increased stress and decreased performance, increasing the risk of employee turnover. According to Lo (2015), who studied employee turnover factors, an employee’s commute may be classified as a distal factor influencing their turnover intentions. In addition, employees struggling to find a work-life balance receiving unsolicited job offers may increase the risk of employee turnover because struggling employees may be considering alternatives to help them lower the cost and time incurred by commuting to work (Kim & Park, 2017).

Kim and Park (2017) also studied the influence of unsolicited job opportunities on employee turnover. An employee with high levels of stress due to the long commute and is experiencing low job performance who receives unsolicited job opportunities may start reevaluating their current skill set to assess the job market, thereby increasing the risk for employee turnover (Rubenstein, Kammeyer-Mueller, Wang, & Thundiyil, 2019). Employees with highly desirable skills set may find employment opportunities that better fit their needs.

Environmental factors are also related to employee gender (Lo, 2015). The fabric of our society has changed, and now, the burden of family financial responsibilities belongs to both men and women (Krishnakuamar, 2016). According to Krishnakuamar (2016), women in India are entering the IT consultancy service industry, and it has surpassed having 100,000 women employees. Women in technology is a great sign that society is moving forward and recognizing the value of women in the corporate world (Krishnakuamar, 2016). Krishnakuamar reported that the female-to-male ratio in the IT workforce in India is 25 to 75. Factors such as stressful time constraints and cultural support may also have an impact on job satisfaction and turnover (Krishnakuamar, 2016). The time factor relates to employees' quality time at work and at home. In a business world that is working 24 hours a day and 365 days a year, work demands and the stress employees' experience may affect workers mentally and physically (Krishnakuamar, 2016). The time factor that influences employee turnover can be examined using the two-factor theory by Herzberg et al. (1959). Time can be a subcategory of working conditions as a hygiene factor to help lower the risk of employees becoming dissatisfied. According to Upadhyay, Singh, Jahanyan, and Nair (2016), job stress for IT professionals working overseas is higher than domestic IT projects in India. Krishnakuamar concurred that stress negatively impacts job performance and increases employee turnover. Mahmood and Yadav (2017) found that women were less stressed than men in the IT sector, but that employee turnover, regardless of gender was high. These findings indicate that more people with family responsibilities must share the load of work outside the office. Other environmental factors include subjective norms.

Bilgihan, Barreda, Okumus, and Nusair (2016) defined subjective norm as the pressure a person feels to perform from family members or coworkers. Employee turnover might be connected to the subjective norm if fellow workers in an organization perceive that it is time to look for another job (Huang, Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen, & Hsieh, 2016). Conversely, Lo (2015) found that when workers' perceptions from their work environment is positive, the risk of employee turnover is lower due to positive peer influence (Huang et al., 2016). Using Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, subjective norm might be a subcategory of the hygiene factor, interpersonal relations, since workers often feel the influence of group norms.

According to Lo (2015), the labor market in relation to employee turnover includes two components: employee perception of job opportunities outside their organization and competition from other employers. Behaghel and Moschion (2016) argued that IT jobs increase as older skills and business processes are replaced with technology. Employee turnover is influenced by internal and external factors, including opportunities in the job market (Lee, Fernandez, & Chang, 2018). Employees will assess their current value in the job market if employers' do not help satisfy employees' basic human and professional needs, which can lead to employee turnover (Lee et al., 2018; Pereira, Malik, & Sharma, 2016). Advances in technology such as 3D printing, nanotechnology, Qbit computers, blockchaining, Internet of Things, robotics, and automation are key factors of the information age revolutions (Horton, 2017). According to Horton (2017), by the year 2033, 33% of the jobs will be automated. Business data analytics and robotization of manufacturing lines are only a few trends that are changing the labor market (Horton, 2017). Companies around the world are currently upgrading and integrating more technology to keep up with market demand (Horton, 2017). Consequently, more IT jobs will be available to IT professionals.

Organizational Factors

Organizational factors involve remuneration and include salary and benefits (Naqvi & Bashir, 2015). Lo (2015) and Naqvi and Bashir (2015) agreed that organizational factors such as payment and benefits are important to employees. However, salary and benefits cannot be the only focus of IT employee retention, which should also include consideration of the work environment.

Salary and benefits. According to Naqvi and Bashir (2015), salary and benefits are positively correlated to job satisfaction and may influence employees' decisions when analyzing their current job status. George (2015) concurred with Lo (2015) and Naqvi and Bashir that some employers assume compensation is the only key factor in employee retention. However, according to George, salary seems to be a distant factor to employee retention. Grissom and Mitani (2016) and Zin (2017) found that increasing salary has a positive impact on employees who are charged with difficult tasks. Retaining employees by increasing salary may help lower some employees' intentions to leave the company (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Zin, 2017). However, Vnoučková and Urbancová (2015) partially contradicted this and found that increasing salary for knowledge workers is not a primary factor that influences employees' retention. Zin studied employee salary from the pay equity perspective. Employers should be careful with the company salary scheme because employees with equal skills and workload are sometimes paid different salaries, or one employee may earn a higher salary than others creating a negative work environment and the risk of employee turnover.

Work environment. People react to their surroundings in different ways. For example, an employee working in a company that does not provide an organized working environment may feel uncomfortable and less productive. If the problem is not addressed appropriately and in a timely manner, the company may experience above-average employee retention problems. According to Lo (2015), peer relations are an important part of a successful retention strategy. Companies that provide an environment that fosters teamwork, information sharing, and camaraderie are more likely to have happy workers than those who do not (Lo, 2015). When employees' feel estrangement, it can lower employee engagement, job satisfaction, and negatively impact work environments (Golden & Veiga, 2018). Additionally, coworkers who establish a professional relationship based on trust tend to provide help and support to each other in the workplace (Golden & Veiga, 2018). However, when there is discord and lack of trust between workers, communication and teamwork are affected, adversely affecting employee motivation, performance, and retention (Golden & Veiga, 2018). Employees who share their knowledge with other colleagues enhance companies' capabilities because the information is transferred faster to coworkers who need the information to perform their daily tasks (Golden & Veiga, 2018). Peer relations, trust, and communication are work environment factors that can influence employee turnover, as can subordinate-manager working relationships.

Subordinate-manager working relationships are as important as the relationship between employees, and maintaining positive subordinate-manager relationships is crucial to help retain employees (Lo, 2015). According to Holland, Cooper, and Sheehan, (2017), managers have the opportunity to increase employee work engagement and performance by establishing open communication and listening to employees' ideas, needs, and wants. When an employee trusts their supervisors, it creates a better working environment allowing for open communication without being afraid of negative repercussions for their input (Holland et al., 2017). According to Jimmieson, Tucker, and Campbell (2017), threats to a positive work environment involve different points of view on how to proceed with tasks, company policies, and procedures. However, conflict, when well managed by supervisors, may increase employees' efforts to find solutions to a business problem in creative ways and may not create a lasting negative effect between workers (Holland et al., 2017; Jimmieson et al., 2017). Koseoglu, Liu, and Shalley (2017) and Jimmieson et al. concurred that it is an important supervisor role to manage employees to lower conflict and increase problem-solving and creativity. Supervisors can be key agents for conflict management and creative, but not strategic, change (Jimmieson et al., 2017; Koseoglu et al., 2017). My research considered the supervisor role from a strategic point of view to increase IT employee peer-to-peer relationships and inspire creativity and employees' sense of belonging.

Employee retention becomes difficult when a supervisor does not have the necessary leadership and people skills to be in charge of a team (Lo 2015; Reina, Rogers, Peterson, Byron, & Hom, 2017). According to Reina et al. (2017), retaining key employees remains one of the biggest challenges for IT companies. A supervisor who lacks leadership skills may be the reason for employee exodus, creating a double-edged problem for the company because the organization is losing their key employees who may be subsequently employed by their competitors (Reina et al., 2017). Supervisor threats, demands, and micromanaging styles can create an uncomfortable working environment for employees, decreasing opportunities for employee retention (Reina et al., 2017). Reina et al. provided information about why employees leave their current jobs. However, the present study helped provide strategies to help organizations retain their key IT employees by exploring how successful strategies currently used by executives help with retention.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) also plays an important part in employee work satisfaction, which can positively influence employee turnover and retention (Carnahan, Kryscynski, & Olson, 2017). According to Carnahan et al. (2017), CSR may increase work meaningfulness, therefore motivating employees and lowering turnover intentions. Carnahan et al. found that companies with high levels of CSR efforts have reduced levels of employee turnover. According to Bode, Singh, and Rogan (2015), companies are increasing their CSR efforts leading to increased employee retention. Company employees who are motivated, who are high performers, and who enjoy company citizenship are great assets to the company (Bode et al., 2015). Highly motivated employees think their jobs are meaningful and help the greater good. Otherwise, employees may begin looking for job alternative to fill the void (Carnahan et al., 2017). Bode et al. mentioned that company employee treatment is an important factor of employee retention and that CSR alone will not influence an employee to stay with the company. In addition, employees may start reconsidering their job meaningfulness after an event that forces them to reevaluate their perceived job situation.

Carnahan et al. (2017) suggested that companies with high CSR initiatives may experience high employee retention rates due to the firm creating a prosocial reputation. Therefore, companies may help keep their talent and create opportunities to reach a new talent pool who better fit the company (Carnahan et al., 2017). In addition, employees may receive recognition from people outside the company for their involvement in activities to better their community through their company (Bode et al., 2015; Carnahan et al., 2017). Bode et al. (2015) also argued that employee retention also could be increased by providing socially-minded employees an avenue to satisfy their needs for social engagement. Flammer and Luo (2017) suggested that companies use CSR as a strategic management tool to increase employee motivation and consequently improve employee retention. Companies' efforts to retain employees by creating CSR programs to benefit society is a good strategy (Flammer & Luo, 2017). However, Flammer and Luo suggested that organizations' CSR efforts could be employee centered as well. Some CSR created to benefit employees include flextime and childcare support (Flammer & Luo, 2017). Flammer and Luo mentioned that employee CSR could be used as an employee governance tool that may help increase employee retention because it may help with employee nurturing, such as helping to align employee incentives, lower unsolicited job offer attractiveness, and enhance communication (Flammer & Luo, 2017). Flammer and Luo further argued that CSR efforts help company employee retention efforts, especially if the organization operates in a highly competitive industry such as IT outsourcing service organizations. CSR is increasingly becoming an important factor in employee turnover decisions.

IT Workforce

Information is the new currency as business organizations keep integrating technology into their business processes, increasing the demand for workers with high IT skill sets (Shin & Jin Park, 2017). According to a 2018 report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the IT workforce in the United States is growing 13% faster than any other job market. The IT industry in India is also growing faster than any other industry and is expected to reach three million workers by 2025 (McKensey, 2017). The IT workforce may be the fastest growing workforce internationally.

Hollister et al. (2017) found that employers seek employees with a good foundation in business, but candidates with solid IT background are preferred over other job applicants. Kang and Kaur (2018) found that India leads two thirds of the global IT industry service market. As the demand increases for information vital to make business decisions to maximize profit, minimize cost, or expand market presence, more information systems are integrated into business processes. Therefore, this demand makes workers with high IT skills more marketable. Studies in the United States and India show that the IT workforce is in high demand and is increasingly important for today's business success (Kang & Kaur, 2018; Shin & Jin Park, 2017). However, other countries struggle to fill IT positions and retain IT talent.

Pakistan, China, and Sri Lanka are struggling with the information technology workforce (Rahman & Fazal, 2018). Rahman and Fazal (2018) studied the IT workforce challenges from the point of view of supply and demand. While some companies struggle to retain employees, there are other companies in developing countries where the IT workforce is almost nonexistent, encouraging employers to review employee skill sets and consider technical training (Rahman & Fazal, 2018). Companies in developing countries such as Pakistan, China, and Sri Lanka have few options to address their IT workforce shortage problem (Rahman & Fazal, 2018). These companies in developing countries depend on India and the United States to address the IT talent gap by paying a higher rate (Rahman & Fazal, 2018). According to Rahman and Fazal, Sri Lanka alone has a shortage of around 118,000 IT jobs to fill. However, such situations may be the exception rather than the rule.

As the business world evolves to integrate more technology and information systems, there is a need for creating better strategies to retain the best IT employees. The data increase in the information age has helped create new IT job opportunities that involve sophisticated IT skill sets. Current IT professionals with a high demand skill set may find increased opportunities in the job market. However, developing countries have a bigger challenge related to the IT workforce due to the lack of people with the right IT skill sets required to compete in the global economy.

Employee Turnover

Employee turnover is the term used to describe employees leaving their jobs (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Guha & Chakrabarti, 2016). Employee turnover may present a challenge to companies that lack understanding and strategies to manage the turnover impact on the business (Vnoučková & Urbancová, 2015). Employee turnover can cost companies money to hire and train new employees to fill outgoing employees' positions.

A company failing to retain employees may not be able to achieve competitive advantage because the higher the employee turnover, the more key knowledge and skills employers lose (Khandelwal & Shekhawat, 2018). According to Khandelwal and Shekhawat (2018), employee turnover is considered one of the biggest threats to company success. Therefore, company leadership must be aware of their company employee turnover rate and design strategies to increase employee retention, which may include reducing stress and burnout.

According to Armstrong and Riemenschneider (2015), IT employees suffering from burnout due to long working hours and high stress are more likely to leave the job than those who are not burned out. Companies lacking strategies for high IT skill workers to keep motivated, stay healthy, and engage in productive work habits may have higher

IT employee turnover than companies that have such strategies (Armstrong & Riemenschneider, 2015). Employee turnover presents organizations with many challenges; however, it also provides opportunities (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2016). Employee turnover provides the business with an opportunity to replace an inefficient employee with a new person who may be a better fit for the job (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2016). Employers also may benefit from employee turnover when toxic employees leave the company (Housman& Blu, 2015). The present study diverges from that of Armstrong and Riemenschneider in that information will be gathered from IT outsourcing executive and not IT professionals.

Employee turnover may be perceived as having a negative impact because business processes critical for the organization to keep operating at optimum levels may suffer. When an employee leaves a job, there is a segment of knowledge that is lost to the corporation, with a potential to be used by a competitor (Vnoučková & Urbancová, 2015). According to Ni, Ye, Ke, and Wu (2015) and Lee, Hom, Eberly, Li, and Mitchell (2017), employee turnover may create a chain reaction within the company where other workers may begin to question their job stability, professional opportunities, and value of their participation. Company leaders should address the situation accordingly making sure the business will maintain operations with minimum disruption. The present study revealed new and creative strategies that could help employers retain their best employees and hire the best job applicants.

Workforce Reduction

For organizations to be successful, businesses must be able to successfully maximize profit and minimize cost (Jung, 2015). Profit maximization and cost minimization are forecasted based on business data (Jung, 2015). When organizations realize that the forecasted financial numbers will not be met, they use different strategies to finish the year as close as possible to the goal (Jung, 2015; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018). If numbers are outside of the forecasted parameters, then executives may use layoffs to help reach the financial goal (Jung, 2015). In their study, Luan and Tien (2015) found that economics and how the industry performs are indicators for potential workforce reduction, as well as are cutting cost, lack of funds, reduction of work, relocation, mergers, buyouts, outsourcing, early project termination, and technology implementation. Maximizing profit and minimizing cost may also involve involuntary employee turnover.

To reduce cost and save money, companies may identify several alternatives, including early retirement, layoff of newer employees, reduced work weeks, unpaid vacations, layoff of employees with high salaries, lump sum payments, or taking advantage of technology (Fischer & Henderson, 2015; Luftman et al., 2015; Manz, Fugate, Hom, & Millikin, 2015). However, companies' workforces may seem to be expensive, and with salaries and benefits, employee layoffs are an easy target for cutting costs (Lin, 2016; Tiwari & Lenka, 2018). Employee layoffs allow executives to reallocate the money to other areas that might seem more appropriate (Tiwari & Lenka, 2018). Lin (2016) and Stef (2018) argued that another reason for workforce reduction might be that the business has more debts than profits, lacking the funds to pay their workers. According to Lin, one reason is that organizations must move revenues to their creditors and shareholders to secure payments and compensation. However, Stef studied business bankruptcy and strategies that employers could use before considering employee layoffs, including contract renegotiation or finding new suppliers with lower cost, performing a project performance assessment, and eliminating projects that no longer align with the business strategic plan or are over budget (Too, Le, & Yap, 2017). The present study focused on successful strategies executives use to retain IT employees in the outsourcing business. Using the two-factor theory and taking into consideration the workforce reduction reasons and strategies above, I found new ideas to retain key IT workforce successfully.

Additionally, companies relocate for different reasons to reach a new customer base, and the cost of real state may be lower in their target locations (Kapitsinis, 2017). Another reason for a company to relocate may be to have better access to more skilled workers (Kapitsinis, 2017). In their study, Stentoft, Mikkelsen, and Jensen (2016) mentioned that manufacturing companies with greater labor flexibility bring more opportunities to the business. The IT outsourcing industry and the large talent pool help to relocate businesses to minimize cost and allow for the flexibility required for a successful transition (Stentoft et al., 2016). The present study revealed ways for IT outsourcing companies to provide the quality IT skills to manufacturing companies regardless of location.

Company mergers can also increase the chance of employee layoffs due to job redundancy (Brueller, Carmeli, & Markman, 2018). When companies decide to sell one of the companies' subsidiaries for cash, one strategy to cut costs is having an IT outsourcing initiative in place, which also makes for a less protected employee base (Dessaint et al., 2017). Companies with a unionized labor force may have a harder time using employee layoffs as a strategy to lower business costs (Dessaint et al., 2017). Other reasons for layoffs include buyouts and a change of administration or business ownership (Brueller et al., 2018). Perhaps the new administration decides to implement new policies to change the current workplace, and some employees are no longer a good fit and are laid off (Brueller et al., 2018). Organizations also could outsource part of their operations, and the IT department from many companies are outsourcing to managed service providers (Luftman et al., 2015). Managed service providers can offer higher IT skills at a fraction of the cost of staffing an entire IT department (Luftman et al., 2015). Automation in manufacturing lines, warehouses, supermarkets, and online stores lower the need for hiring people and increase the likelihood of layoffs since machines sometimes replace human labor (Coeckelbergh, 2015). Oesterreich and Teuteberg (2018) argued that organizations should consider the advantage of business automation because it increases efficiency and effectiveness. However, Oesterreich and Teuteberg examined the benefits of automation from a cost standpoint. The present study provided insight into the research on IT outsourcing and the importance of IT outsourcing companies to retain their high IT skill employees.

Employee layoffs are part of business strategies to help organizations achieve their financial goals (Chialing Hsieh, Yi Ren, & Lirely, 2016). The rapid evolution of technology, in part, demands workers with high technical skills replacing employees who no longer have the necessary technical knowledge to perform the job, which can result in layoffs (Cho & Ahn, 2018). Workforce reduction seems to be a quick answer to some companies' economic challenges, but it is not clear to what extent layoffs positively impact organizations.

Business executives need to understand their company labor force to increase the chances of success (Cimbálníková, 2017). IT is a highly competitive field, and companies outside the IT industry need the technical skills to introduce new technology to their business processes to improve performance and realize a profit or keep their competitive advantage (Millers & Sceulovs, 2017). Companies operating in the IT industry try to innovate faster than their direct competitors. However, due to the high demand for IT skill employees, some companies face difficulties retaining their IT talent impacting the company directly (Kang & Kaur, 2018). A business leader who has employee retention problems must self-evaluate to find the root cause of the employee retention problem (Kang & Kaur, 2018). If executives cannot design and implement strategies to retain their best IT talent, they may suffer from an IT talent exodus.

IT outsourcing companies provide high-level technical support to companies that lack IT employees with the knowledge to implement new technologies (Naim & Lenka, 2017). In addition, IT outsourcing companies may be contracted to take over business IT operations. Therefore, IT outsourcing companies must have strategies in place to keep their highly skilled employees or may face serious problems that may negatively affect companies' competitive edge (Upadhyay, Singh, Jahanyan, & Nair, 2016). Knowledge is key to any business, and problems may arise when key IT talent leaves the company creating a brain drain (Kumar et al., 2017; Sharma & Nambudiri, 2015). Because IT workers are usually in demand regardless of economic fluctuations, company executives should understand how to retain them.

Business leaders should create strategies to help retain the IT talent pool by understanding the human being (Krishnakuamar, 2016). When company leadership, for example, chief executive officers, chief operational officers, chief financial officers, and the human resources leaders, lack understanding of motivational theories, for example, Herzberg's (1959) two factor-theory, there is a higher risk for the company to experience problems retaining their IT talent pool. Problems arise because leaders are unable to design and implement successful employee retention strategies (Baskar & Prakash Rajkumar, 2015). A company with employee retention problems may think that increasing employees' salary is the fastest solution to employee retention. However, Herzberg's two-factor theory includes nine hygiene factors that help understand how to keep employees motivated without increasing motivation. The component in Herzberg's two-factor theory is motivation that includes six motivational factors that involve employee satisfaction and psychological growth. Using Herzberg's two-factor theory, the present study revealed different ways to motivate an employee and increase retention.

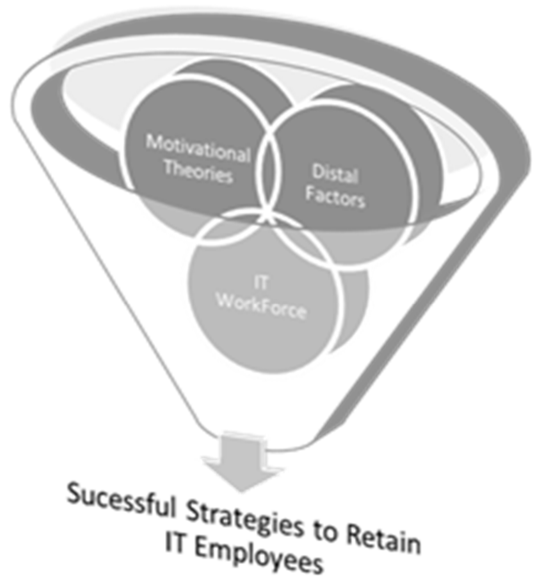

Figure 1. A conceptual view of how various bodies of knowledge contribute to developing a successful business strategy towards talent retention.

Company leadership, when trying to solve the IT employee retention problem, may find themselves in conflict (Baskar & Prakash Rajkumar, 2015). Some research studies may suggest factors to consider, but practitioners should understand and adapt them to their working environments (Baskar & Prakash Rajkumar, 2015). Several companies might be facing an employee retention problem, but each one of them may approach the problem in different ways. A CEO changes the company's culture and vision without employee buy-in, and perhaps the new culture provides employees with the opportunity to work from home, but some employees see that as an opportunity for the employer to keep them working beyond business hours (Henke et al., 2016). Perhaps the company agreed to work for the Department of Defense on a top-secret long-range missile making the employees uncomfortable that they are working on killing machines instead of helping advance humanity (Ristino & Michalak, 2018). Company CEOs should be careful in revising the company's new vision, target markets clearly, and appeal to employees by listening to employees' voices and considering their concerns (Alfayad & Arif, 2017). Company culture and buy-in can be salient factors in employee turnover intentions.

A company's leadership should design a strategy to minimize employee turnover and implement it on a timely manner to maximize the opportunity of keeping the high IT skilled employees required for a new Department of Defense contract because without them the company may no longer have the high technical skills the new project requires to be successful. CFOs may find themselves in a dilemma because based on the company financial status, there may be employee layoff to balance the budget. Laying off employees may seem like the right solution at the time. However, layoffs could negatively affect employees' performance and attitude toward the employer and ultimately cause more damage to the company in the end (López Bohle, Bal, Jansen, Leiva, & Alonso, 2017). Human resources departments should help top executives to identify ways to recognize employees' work, but there should be a clear and fair process to recognize those employees (Baskar & Prakash Rajkumar, 2015). A problem may arise if a relatively new hire gets recognized for their work, and more senior employees have never received recognition for their work and years of service (Baskar & Prakash Rajkumar, 2015). The paradox for HR is that perhaps the newer employee has been able to bring more business to the company in a short time compared to others. A strategy for employee recognition should be designed to motivate all employees for helping the company achieve their strategic goals and motivate key IT employees (Baskar & Prakash Rajkumar, 2015). A simple *thank you* directly from company executives goes a long way to keep employees engaged and feeling good about their jobs and successfully making employee retention effort a success. Employee recognition can also be a salient factor in employee retention.

Transition

Section 1 of this project included the foundation and background for this qualitative single case study. In the literature review, I described the IT workforce, IT employee turnover, and cost of turnover, and Hertzberg's (1959) two-factor theory. Hertzberg's two-factor theory helps to understand the workplace motivators that help develop a successful workplace balance. The focus of my literature was to help IT outsourcing business executives create strategies to retain high skill IT workers using Hertzberg's two-factor theory as a lens for understanding the high employee turnover problem. IT outsourcing companies' leadership must understand the negative impact that high employee turnover has on company profit goals to better position the business to be profitable.

In Section 2, I discuss the processes and procedures for this qualitative single case study including details about the role of the researcher, the population, and methods to collect data. I also discuss the research method, design, and ethical considerations. In addition, I have detailed the process of data collection and techniques to increase study reliability and validity.

Section 3 includes the research findings. Section 3 also includes how to apply the new knowledge in a professional setting, and the implications for social change. I concentrate on the possible application of my results, recommendations for future research, and present my conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies IT outsourcing business executives use to keep key IT employee talent. The population of this study consisted of three IT outsourcing business executives in Massachusetts who had developed and implemented successful retention strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover. The results of this study may contribute to social change by assisting a company achieve high employee retention so they may contribute to civic engagement and help identify and address issues of public concern by increasing community volunteering, participating in charitable activities and philanthropy, and becoming politically active by petitioning and collaborating with local authorities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, analysis, and reporting within a qualitative study (Schultze & Avital, 2011). According to Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012), qualitative researchers use all their senses to comprehend the research objectives. The researcher converts the data being collected into a representation of the phenomena (Pezalla et al., 2012).

In this study, I conducted semistructured interviews using an interview protocol to guide the data collection process (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Before collecting any data, I provided participants with a comprehensive explanation of the study and ensured they understood the intent of the study and their role as participants in the study. As the researcher, I was aware of my own bias and assumptions. Additionally, I used strategies intended to minimize the potential influence of bias that may have misled my research findings (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I also implemented ethical behavior to manage ethical issues. Ethical behavior comprises abiding to research protocols and guidelines to minimize bias that may negatively affect research findings (Yin, 2018). Establishing and implementing ethical behaviors aligned with the principles outlined in the *Belmont Report* is imperative for scholarly science research (Myers & Venable, 2014). I completed The National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research online training. The National Institutes of Health training certifies professional researchers who work with human subject. I displayed ethical behaviors in this study by using a standard, structured data collection method.

I employed bracketing to manage my biases during the research process (see Tufford & Newman, 2012). Once the researcher realistically understands their own bias, they then can proceed with interviews and data collection, analysis, and present study findings from a neutral point of view (Adu, 2019). I also implemented a standard, structured method for data collection to ensure consistency. As the researcher, I strictly followed the same semistructured interview approach with all study participants (see Appendix A). I employed a standard procedure to ensure that my personal rapport with participants did not influence the process of data collection. Following a standard procedure also helped maintain integrity in data collection by reducing the risk of errors.

I was familiar with the research problem because I currently work for an IT outsourcing company providing per project or staff augmentation consulting services to other businesses. The study was conducted in the Massachusetts area. To further avoid bias, I did not conduct the study at my current place of work. While my dual roles as a field IT practitioner and researcher may have created an environment that facilitated bias in the study and conflict due to the close relationship between the study and my daily work activities, as a practitioner, I used bracketing to manage this potential for bias and conflict.

Participants

I interviewed participants employed as IT outsourcing business executives in Massachusetts who had developed and implemented successful retention strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover. The selected organization provides IT outsourcing services to other companies, including managed services, staff augmentation, and virtual support. Participating individuals must have had professional experience working with employee retention at an IT outsourcing company and held a leadership position as a chief information officer, , CEO, a senior human resources position, or were currently managing senior IT professionals. Participants were also required to have at least 3 years of working experience in an IT outsourcing company and had experience in implementing effective employee retention strategies. The goal was to collect data from professionals who dealt with IT employee retention on a daily basis. I selected these individuals because of their unique experiences within the field of IT and their ability to contribute data related to strategies that could be used to address the purpose of the research.

Potential study participants received a formal written invitation to participate in the study from me by e-mail. I then distributed informed consent forms to individuals who indicated an interest in participating in the study. Participants reviewed and completed the informed consent form prior to scheduling the interview. I established face-to-face communication prior to the study and conducted background interviews with each participant as strategies to develop rapport with them (see DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Novick, 2008).

Research Method

I employed a qualitative research method to explore the IT employee retention problem directly from the viewpoint of company leaders who struggle with IT retention challenges on a daily basis. Thomas (2015) used a qualitative method to explore retention strategies IT leaders use while trying to retain IT employees. A qualitative method was most appropriate for this study because I was interviewing and collecting data from individuals who were tasked with retaining IT professionals. The quantitative method facilitates the use of surveys and the quantification of data and findings (Tominc, Krajnc, Vivod, Lynn, & Frešer, 2018). The numerical measurement and analysis of study data was not the primary goal of this study and would not have allowed the depth of data necessary to address the research problem and purpose. I used the qualitative approach to explore the phenomenon through real-life experiences, not from an analysis of relationships between variables. Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because I did not use statistical analysis to accept or reject a hypothesis regarding relationships or differences among variables (Bazeley, 2015). The mixed method approach was not appropriate for this study because the incorporation of quantitative and qualitative methods to collect multifaceted data regarding the variables and constructs of interest was not the purpose of this study.

Research Design

For this study, I employed a single case study design. Using a case study design, I facilitated data collection directly from business executives who were able to address the problem of retaining key IT employee talent. According to Yin (2018), researchers use case study designs to explore a current phenomenon in its real-world context. The case study design was appropriate for this study because my focus was to identify and explore the successful strategies for retaining key IT talent phenomena in its context. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), the case study design allows consideration of the problem from a different lens that may allow uncovering different facets from the phenomena. I explored the strategies used to retain key IT talent through interviews, document review, and observational notes.

I determined that the single case study design was the best suited approach to guide this study. Phenomenology was not appropriate for this study because phenomenological researchers maintain a focus on the essence of a phenomenon from the participants' lived experiences and points of view (see Song, 2017). Although the experiences of participants were explored, I was interested in moving beyond a description of their experiences to an analysis of what strategies work as well as how and why these strategies work. A case study approach is well suited when a researcher intends to explore the *how* and *why* of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Ethnography was not appropriate for this study because researchers use the ethnographic design to explore the behavior of groups or cultures in natural settings (see Dahles & Susilowati, 2015). Narrative inquiry was also not appropriate for this study because researchers use narrative inquiry for collecting or telling stories (see Byrne, 2017). My intent was to focus on how IT professionals retain key IT talent.

A qualitative, single case study design was suitable to understand the inquiry in the context of the IT industry. Patton (2014) explained that a qualitative inquiry is an effective tool to understand how a system functions. A single case study design provides the level of detail that is required to understand the context of an organization. Silverman (2015) asserted that the single case study design could also be considered as an instrumental case study approach. Similar to instrumental case studies, within a single case study design, a case is selected to emphasize a specific dynamic of interest that may be existent in the selected case (Silverman, 2015). Within this single case study, I recruited and interviewed IT professionals from the selected organization to understand the specific dynamics and strategies that allow them to retain key IT talent.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of IT outsourcing business executives. The sample for this study was three IT outsourcing business executives in Massachusetts who had developed and implemented successful retention strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover. According to Yin (2018), researchers use case study designs to explore a current phenomenon in its real-world context.

For this study, I used preselected criteria to qualify individuals for participation in the study. Yin (2018) defined purposeful sampling as the procedure of recruiting a small number of study participants with experience related to the phenomena of interest. Purposeful sampling may be implemented to identify and select cases rich in information, which can be efficiently secured to obtain data using limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2015; Wang, Kung, Wang, & Cegielski, 2018). Implementing a purposeful sampling approach increases the validity of a study (Palinkas et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2018). However, the range of variation in responses is unknown until after the research has begun; therefore, it is beneficial to use an iterative sampling approach, including member checking, to make sure data saturation occurs (Palinkas et al., 2015). Saturation refers to the point where the inclusion of new cases does not yield new or novel themes in data analysis (Tracy, 2012). A sample size should be selected that allows the researcher to achieve saturation in qualitative research (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). In a meta-analysis of qualitative research, Boddy (2016) indicated that a sample of 10 participants was sufficient to achieve saturation in a case study. While Yin (2018) indicated that the quality of the data should determine sample size, and Braun and Clarke (2017) suggested that a sample of six to 10 participants is sufficient. In this study, I secured a sample of three participants in an attempt to reach saturation.

Using semistructured interview questions, I collected data from IT outsourcing professionals in leadership positions that require managing and leading IT workers. All participants had experience in the IT outsourcing industry and were employed in the selected organization in the Massachusetts area. I recruited participants with similar IT backgrounds. To access participants, I contacted the company in person and then requested authorization to conduct the study within the organization. With the permission of the organization, I contacted potential participants through a recruitment e-mail and requested that interested individuals respond to the e-mail for screening. I screened participants via e-mail to ensure they met the inclusion criteria and scheduled interviews with individuals who met the inclusion criteria. Prior to beginning the interview, I provided participants with an informed consent form.

Ethical Research

Following being granted Approval Number 03-28-19-0653682 by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I began data collection. I followed the ethical standards established by the Walden University IRB and the *Belmont Report*'s ethical code during recruitment, data collection, data analysis, data reporting, and data storage (see Cugini, 2015). Ethical standards are implemented to fulfill researchers' responsibilities to protect participants (Flick, 2015). Prior to recruitment, I secured approval to recruit participants and conduct interviews for the study with the director of human resources at the selected organization.

I began the process of collecting data after the company contact person provided me with a written cooperation letter. Interested participants received an invitation to participate in the study from me via e-mail or telephone call. All participants completed an informed consent form prior to participating in the study. The informed consent form detailed the purpose of the study, the procedure for participating in the study, participants' rights within the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in the study (see Appendix B). Consenting individuals were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities. I also used these pseudonyms to remove their data if a participant wished to exercise their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence. If a participant decided to withdraw from the study, I thanked them for their contribution and time and deleted all data files associated with them. I did not provide any incentives for participation in the study.

I stored all electronic data on a password-protected, personal computer. I stored all physical documents in a locked filing cabinet, located in my home office. I retained sole access to the data. After 5 years, I will destroy and delete the data. I will delete the electronic data from my computer and shred the physical documents, including the informed consent forms.

Data Collection Instruments

Within qualitative studies, the primary data collection instrument is the researcher because they are embedded in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Salge, Kohli, & Barrett, 2015). I collected data using semistructured interviews and document review. The interview protocol consisted of seven semistructured, open-ended questions designed to collect data related to successful strategies for retaining key IT talent (Appendix A). In a semistructured, open-ended interview, the researcher has the flexibility to ask additional relevant questions to further explore a response that is not clear or that brings up a new aspect of the phenomenon under study (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). Probing questions aid researchers in understanding participants' perspectives by delving into their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

During the face to face interviews, I used a video camera and a digital recording device to record the interview process and enhance the quality of data collection. To minimize distractions during the interview process such as telephone calls, mobile devices notifications, or other employees inquires, I used conference rooms at the participant's business location. Study participants were interviewed individually and digitally recorded with a video camera and a digital recording. All research participants were asked to provide consent to video and audio record their interviews; one participant declined so I recorded this participant's responses by hand.

In addition to face-to-face semistructured interviews, I collected data by reviewing documents provided by the company about employee retention (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) recommended at least two sources of data collection for case studies. I used face-to-face interviews and company official documents relevant to employee retention (see Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). According to Harvey (2015), researchers conducting a case study and face-to-face interviews may use member checking to improve study reliability and validity. Member checking is used in qualitative research as a quality control process to verify the data is correct by providing each study participant with a written summary of the data collected during the interview process for accuracy. The member checking process according to Morse (2015) encompasses three steps including conducting the initial face-to-face interview, researcher interpretation of the interview, and then, the researcher shares the interpretation with study participants to validate accuracy.

Data Collection Technique

Semistructured interviews were the primary source of data for this study. Company documents served as a secondary source of data. I compared the information gathered from the two sources of data. By triangulating the findings across data sources, I enhanced the trustworthiness of the data. The reliability and validity of the findings were enhanced by expert review of the interview protocol as a quality control mechanism. A subsample of participants were asked to provide feedback regarding the clarity and accuracy of the interview questions. Prior to the interviews I noted participants' responses and modified the interview protocol. Face-to-face interviews are a good tool for qualitative researchers because they provide the opportunity to pose probing questions and observe participants' verbal and body language (Ziebland & Hunt, 2014). Face-to-face interviews provide better control during the interview process (Krall, Wamboldt, & Lohse (2015).

Yin (2018) posited that document review allows researchers to gather quality data from official company documents. I requested authorization to access relevant documents about company employee retention via e-mail. I obtained participant permission to audio record the interviews prior to conducting the interviews. I used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. Using pseudonyms to identify participants enhanced confidentiality and allowed the researcher to remove data for participants who opted to withdraw from the study by removing the data associated with their pseudonym (Allen &

Wiles, 2016). All data collected were digitally secured using encryption, and paper documentation was securely stored in a safe. All data will be destroyed after 5 years.

Data Organization Technique

I organized and managed the data files using NVivo version 11. NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software which can be used to manage rich qualitative data and organize the data during analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). I entered the audio files, documents, and observation notes into NVivo immediately following each interview. I transcribed the individual interview recordings and store the transcriptions in NVivo. The data were deidentified using each participant’s unique pseudonym. I maintained a listing of the pseudonyms linked to participants’ actual identities in a separate, password-protected file. This file was not stored with the actual data to maintain the confidentiality of the data. I also used the pseudonyms to identify the observational notes within NVivo prior to data analysis. No coding was necessary for the document review because they were linked to a particular participant. I redacted identifying information listed on the documents prior to uploading the documents into NVivo. I stored the paper data in a locked file cabinet in my locked personal office. I stored the electronic data on my personal password protected computer. I will store the data for 5 years. At the end of this period, I will shred all paper data and permanently delete all electronic files from my computer.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis (TA) to analyze data from the study. Clarke and Braun’s (2017) framework for thematic analysis can be used to develop themes from participant data. Thematic analysis provides a systematic approach for generating codes and themes from qualitative data. According to Clarke and Braun , codes are the initial step to developing consensus and meaning from all the data collected in the study. For the purposes of the TA, I used NVivo software to organize the coding process. The identified themes were compared with the key concepts presented in the literature review to analyze how the identified themes aligned with the key concepts being discussed in the current literature. The data analysis method I used is methodological triangulation. According to Fusch et al. (2018) researchers use triangulation to minimize bias and increase the opportunity for data saturation. I use the face-to-face interview transcripts, the company documents, and notes in the triangulation process.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability within qualitative studies refers to the dependability of the study. Dependability refers to the ability to replicate the findings of the study given identical context, methods, and participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In research, reliability is fundamental as researchers strive to make sure the research data is accurate (Sayed & Nelson, 2015). I implemented member checking of the findings to enhance credibility (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I shared the findings of the data analysis and identified themes with the participants to confirm their agreement with the findings. Participants were given an opportunity to review the initial themes to confirm that the findings reflected their data. Transferability refers to the ability to generalize the findings and apply the findings across varying individuals and contexts (Merriam, 2009). I used rich, thick description to enhance transferability. By presenting the findings in sufficient detail, readers will be able to contextualize the findings and assess their applicability within their unique environment (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, I achieved saturation to sufficiently address the phenomenon of interest. I considered saturation to be achieved when including additional participants did not reveal novel or new themes during data analysis (Tracy, 2012). Inclusion of sufficient cases to reach saturation will enhance the detail of the description, as more cases yielded more robust data with numerous data points. Confirmability refers to objectivity within the study and the researcher's ability to accurately capture the perspectives of the participants without the researcher's own bias or preconceived notions (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I engaged in bracketing to ensure my bias does not influence the study. I also used methodological triangulation to enhance confirmability within the study. Methodological data triangulation includes the use of multiple sources of data to develop findings (Oliveira, França, & Rangel, 2018). Lopes and de Carvalho (2018) implemented methodological data triangulation to gain an in depth understanding of the research methods they used in their study. I conducted interviews, document review, and observational note collection in this study.

Finally, I assessed the face validity of the interview protocol by collecting feedback on the clarity of questions from a panel of experts. Face validity has been defined as the extent to which a measure assesses the intended measure (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Expert review of an interview protocol is an accepted form of demonstrating face validity (Hardesty & Bearden, 2004). Through expert review of the instrument, I conferred with an expert panel comprised of three to establish the degree to which the interview protocol addresses strategies do outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I presented the purpose, role of the researcher, and participants. The research method and research design were discussed in detail, along with the feasibility of the approach. The research instrumentation and process were also discussed, as well as the methods for data collection and analysis. Methods for improving the validity and reliability of the research were also discussed. In Section 3, I will present the results of the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies IT outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent. To address this purpose, I developed the following research question: What strategies do outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent? The findings from this qualitative, single case study show that IT outsourcing business executives use several ways to retain key IT employee talent. Business executives develop personal relationships with employees. Additionally, developing a strong company culture is important for business executives to retain employees. Finally, business executives found that investing in employee training and using employees' strengths were effective ways to retain key IT employee talent.

Presentation of Findings

To analyze the data for this project study, I used Clarke and Braun's (2017) TA. The results of this TA yielded one theme: strategies for employee retention. This theme contained three subthemes: building personal relationships, creating a positive company culture, and investing in employee training.

Strategies for Employee Retention

Employee turnover in IT organizations creates a ripple effect that impacts the business itself, other employees, management teams, and the customer (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). According to Sumbal, Tsui, Cheong, and See-to (2018), when talented employees leave, they take their knowledge, training, and resources with them. Managers must find talent to replace the exiting employees, which costs money and resources, and replacing IT talent can take months (Lee, Hom, Eberly, & Li, 2018). When an employee leaves, this often creates anxiety among remaining employees about the future of the company and may lead other employees to leave (Çelik, 2018). Lee et al. (2018) mentioned that customers are also impacted by employee turnover because there may be gaps in services provided or uneven quality of service. As such, retaining talented employees is important for business executives to mitigate this domino effect (Boštjančič & Slana, 2018). This theme was defined by the approaches that outsourcing business executives take to retain their key employees. These approaches fell into three discernible subthemes: building personal relationships, creating positive company culture, and investing in employee training.

Subtheme 1: Building Personal Relationships

Interviews with participants indicated that business executives believe building relationships with their employees to be effective for retaining these employees. Participant 1 tries to create a personal relationship with employees, stating, "I wanna be able to understand what the driving factors are for a specific individual." To do this, Participant 1 talks with employees about scheduling and tries to create a schedule with employees that works with that employee's home life and schedule. It was important for Participant 1 to make sure his/her employees felt cared for. Participant 1 does regular walks around the floors to check in on employees and see how they are doing. Building such a relationship also includes communicating clearly with employees. Participant 1 said, "I don't leave things in a gray area, only because that will give me more work later."

Participant 2 believes that this relationship with employees is based on give and take. Participant 2 recognized that the relationship between an employee and his or her work/office environment does not occur solely during the working day but can spill over into other times of day as well. For this reason, it was important to Participant 2 to build relationships with employees. Participant 2 stated:

> To me, it really starts with a give and take relationship, and our relationship isn't just what happens from 8:00 to 5:00 here, but our team members are going home to their families. So, the work-life balance, again, ensuring that we're meeting them halfway with all of their needs and the ability to work remote, [and] on the job training. So, their personal time that they want to go home and spend with their wife and kids isn't encompassed with having to dig into hours of training to continue their career.

In building this relationship, Participant 2 works to communicate clearly with employees, similarly to Participant 1, and practices transparency. To do this, Participant 2 said, "It's making sure that the picture is clear to them, the expectations, and from there, it's very transparent as to the opportunities that are available to them."

Participant 3 also works to build relationships with employees. This participant had the lowest rate of turnover in the company, which they attributed to the personal relationships they established with employees. Participant 3 said:

> I think that the reason that's the case is because I know the guys. They know that they can come to me. I foster them coming together, I foster their growth, I eliminate bullshit from their pathway so that they can continue to grow.

Herzberg (1959) noted that interpersonal relations in the workplace are one hygiene factor that managers must ensure within the company to mitigate the risk of employees becoming dissatisfied. Hygiene factors, such as interpersonal relations, working conditions, quality of supervision, salary, status, job security, company policies, and administration, are part of the two-factor theory and are important for business leaders to understand to better manage employees' job satisfaction (Method, Melwani, & Rothman, 2017). Method et al., 2017 noted that interpersonal relationships among employees are important to maintain a healthy working environment. The business setting evolved from units working independently to a multidivision, project-oriented environment (Method et al., 2017). The multidivision and project-oriented setting creates a working environment where employees must interact constantly to achieve companies' strategic objectives (Method et al., 2017). The fast pace of data processing to generate information and make business decisions quickly is a team effort; therefore, business leaders need their teams to communicate clearly with each other. Business leaders who do not understand the importance of positive employee relationships increase the chance to have a dysfunctional working environment and higher risk for employee turnover (Fontes, Alarcão, Santana, Pelloso, & Barros Carvalho, 2019). In a study of employee retention, Fontes et al. (2019) reported that 41.8% of employees highlighted the importance for a company to have and maintain healthy employee interpersonal relations. All the participants in the current study agreed that having an open and honest interpersonal relationship positively impacts the opportunity to retain IT employee talent in their company.

Subtheme 2: Creating Positive Company Culture

Participants believed creating a strong, positive company culture was key to retaining good employees. Participant 2 felt that "loyalty gets built around that work-life balance like I said, the employee culture." Cultivating this company culture was important to Participant 1, who said, "I think it's really from a top down approach…understanding that no longer were we gonna accept that the care and feeding of out teams was going to be considered as a secondary task." Having a strong company culture meant employees felt the company takes care of them, according to Participant 1. Participant 3 also believed company culture was important for retaining employees.

To remain competitive as an employer, Participant 2 felt companies needed to pay attention to compensation and culture, saying "Money and culture are the tough ones." Participant 2 continued:

> Especially in the age of millennials, who are very demanding, you really need to have a set of benefits that go beyond health insurance an all that, that are going to attract that population. Sometimes it's not even money. It's really about…flexibility, ability to grow, and ability to feel empowered, that they're making a difference, that they bring value, and that they are valued.

Participant 3 also liked to create a positive company culture for employees. For Participant 3, this was the primary strategy for retaining key talent. "To create a fun environment for all our employees," said Participant 3, "For example, we do cookouts [and] town hall meetings to make sure all our employees, here at headquarters and nationally, feel like one big family."

Finally, data from my observations of the IT businesses under study also indicated the cultivation of a positive company culture. Through observations, I noted casual and relaxed working environments. Employees were dressed casually, indicating a lack of a strict dress code. Additionally, employees brought their dogs to work with them, so clearly pets were allowed in the workplace. These aspects of the office environment signify a relaxed, casual workplace and cultivation of relaxed offices.

Company culture is a hygiene factor based on Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory. According to Hogan and Coote (2014) and Williams and Beidas (2018), business leaders must understand about how organizational culture impacts employee retention. The IT industry is fast and highly competitive, demanding companies to hire and retain the best IT employees; otherwise, employees may leave within 5 years (Huang & Zhang, 2016; Siahaan, 2018). Business leaders must create a company culture based on the company's core values and beliefs to elicit specific employee behaviors (Lin & Johnson, 2018; Schein, 1992). A new generation is part of the labor force, and company culture seems to be an important factor in their decision making about future employers; therefore, business leaders should define the company's culture to attract and retain IT employees (Miles & McCamey, 2018).

Subtheme 3: Investing in Employee Training

IT outsourcing business executives also believed they were able to retain key IT talent by investing in employee training and playing to employees' unique strengths. Participant 2 believed engaging employees' own desires to improve themselves was crucial to retention. Participant 2 recognized this commitment to employee training and improvement should be team-based and not fall solely on the employee, stating,

> Continuing to provide them with the education and training that keeps opening doors for them. It's not all on them. Yes, they've put in a lot of effort themselves to get to where they are, but we're committed to continuing to train our team. Reimbursements for certifications, education tracks, because we're leveraging that knowledge as a business as much as it's a great resume-builder. We're committed to giving that back…It does take constant commitment of our whole organization and team members to buy into developing trainings that team members are going to…Because I do feel that's what's keeping our team here.

Participant 2 was also clear that annual reviews and evaluations played a role in the constant improvement. "Things like one-on-ones and the annual reviews," said Participant 2, "Taking those annual reviews and charting them through the year and really sticking to what we agreed to." Participant 3 also felt training opportunities were important for employees, saying, "Training opportunities, or formal training available, all that to me…I think the challenge is really that is not tangible." Participant 3 continued, "The way that managers interact with their team members…not just have meetings…having quality ones, the ones that are productive, or that lead to…a professional development plan that, again, caters to their needs and desires." However, it was unclear exactly what Participant 3 meant by "not tangible," and this participant did not elaborate on the point.

Participant 3 said training was essential to employee retention. The goal, according to Participant 3, was to keep building employees' skills so those employees could grow with the company. "Helping out employees develop not only technical skills but soft skills that will position the employee for future growth," said Participant 3. This participant continued, "We have highly qualified IT employees and we help them develop business skills that will help them be promoted to a management position or directly working with clients."

Employee training aligns with Herzberg's two-factor theory as a motivational factor. Bibi et al. (2018) noted that employee training has a positive relation to retention. Employee motivation can increase when company invests in the growth of their human resources, such as providing training (Cesário & Chambel, 2017). Cox (2016) mentioned that training is linked to knowledge; therefore, the training of employees is a good motivator that offers opportunities for growth and job advancement, increasing employee retention opportunities. Business leaders who understand the two-factor theory may increase employee retention by introducing a combination of a hygiene factor (i.e., job security) and a motivation factor (i.e., employee training; Krishnan & Umamaheswari, 2016). IT companies that provide consulting services to other businesses must keep up with the latest technologies available and provide the necessary training to their employees (Yeo & Grant, 2019). IT employees lacking the right technical skills to perform their jobs will negatively affect job performance, satisfaction, and lower quality of services to customers (Miller, Grooms, & King, 2018). Bhattacharyya (2018) mentioned that companies in India mitigate the lack of IT skills and employee retention by providing the necessary IT training for companies to obtain and keep their competitive advantage.

Application to Professional Practice

The results of this study are significant to company leaders in several ways. Satisfied employees are more engaged, increasing opportunity for job satisfaction and retention (García, Gonzales-Miranda, Gallo, & Roman-Calderon, 2019). Organizational leaders are recognizing the positive impact of having a happy and engaged workforce in job satisfaction and low employee turnover (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2019). The findings of this study revealed how leaders within one IT outsourcing company successfully created strategies aimed to improve communication and employee relationships, helped define a company culture, and invested in employee training to allow for advancements and growth, thereby helping to lower employee turnover. Company leaders could use the findings to create and implement engaging strategies that focus on a positive employer-employee relationship. They may also use this study to develop strategies that focus on employee overall wellbeing that helps to increase retention of company's high IT skilled talent. Consequently, IT leadership may increase the opportunity to retain their best IT employees and lower the cost the company incurs during the recruiting and hiring of new employees. In addition, faculty in higher education institutions may use this study as a scholarly resource to enhance course quality and real-life solutions in the business world to retain employees.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may contribute to social change when a company with high employee retention contributes to civic engagement to help identify and address issues of public concern by increasing community volunteering, participation in charitable activities, and philanthropy (Opoku-Dakwa, Chen, & Rupp, 2018). Also, political participation by petitioning and collaborating with local authorities allowing for company success and increase influence in the community they serve (Opoku-Dakwa et al., 2018). This study may also have other positive implications for companies, including experiencing lower cost of operations associated with lower employee turnover. Customers and the local community will realize savings in the form of lower prices for goods or services. Company leaders' ability to lower their prices and keep profitability can start a saving and reinvestment chain reaction that will benefit local communities because people will have some disposable income to support local businesses and the community. The following retention strategies used by the IT outsourcing company include building personal relationships, creating positive company culture, and investing in employee training and may help to retain employees and increase employee retention. By implementing these strategies IT leaders as well as other industries leadership can improve their employees' overall work experience leading to higher levels of customer service and excellent customer experience.

Recommendations for Action

This section includes my recommendations for practice. Business leaders in any industry may use the findings of this study to create or modify their strategies to lower IT employee turnover in their organization. Building personal relationships, creating a positive company culture, and investing in employee training are three strategies used by the business leaders in this study to help organizations lower their IT employee turnover rate and increase productivity.

Building personal relationships is important to have a highly productive team. Companies are evolving and moving away from a hierarchical leadership model to a flat model. The hierarchical model is structured and rigid, and the flat model is more flexible, allowing employees at all levels to be more accessible. Company leadership should develop trust, better channels of communication, and respect to build a great team. Business executives can earn their subordinates' trust by demonstrating accountability. A business leader must practice active listening to understand their subordinates better and consider their ideas through the decision-making process. Also, speak clearly and trustfully. Employees who can identify themselves with their leaders have a better opportunity to engage in a more productive team.

Highly productive teams exist in companies with positive company culture. Business leaders should invest time and effort to develop their company culture. The company culture will serve as a foundation for all employees to know and understand companies' core values, as well as know the vision and mission of the company. Companies can start a strategy to accommodate flextime, making sure employee stays productive at all times by lowering the stress of being late for work or to attend personal matters. Flat organizational settings provide an open floor design where all employees can communicate easily. Teams working on projects will not need to restrict their meeting to a conference room. They can use technology to hold the meeting without space constraints.

Consequently, employees will feel less stress since effective team communication is always available. Companies can organize employees’ activities outside the office premises to include family days, cookouts, or any other event inclusive of all employees. The off-premises activities are excellent opportunities for leadership to spend time with their team outside of work and interact on a more personal level with their subordinates and learn some of their challenges and goals.

Business leaders who care about their employees are aware of ways to help them grow in their current position or learn new skills to take on new projects. Lack of training can negatively impact employee productivity and business quality of services. Therefore, companies investing in developing their workforce will increase the opportunity to improve their employee retention rate. Consequently, the company is securing knowledge and continuity of services. Customers’ services will enjoy continuity of services, improving the chances for contract renewal and increase in revenue.

My recommendation to business leaders is to consider the results of this study, explore, test, and implement the strategies found in this study to increase the opportunity for employee retention. I will provide a summary of the findings to the study participants and make the research available through online academic databases for public access. I will also consider sharing this study by providing consulting services and training.

Recommendations for Further Study

Business researchers should invest more time and resources to continue looking for novel ways to retain IT employees. A new generation of employees will always be entering the workforce. Therefore, researchers should keep investigating new ways to understand and apply leadership strategies. The participants used in this study represented IT executives working for an IT outsourcing company and have more than 5 years of experience managing IT professionals in complex environments. Researchers could explore leadership strategies used to retain IT employees in a specific IT specialization, for example, information security working in defense, financial, or healthcare industries. A potential limitation before conducting the study was finding enough participants to take part in the study. Executives leading an IT outsourcing company have busy schedules and travel frequently making the interview scheduling process difficult but finding participants who fit the study criteria was not a problem. Study participants' field expertise leading IT companies allowed for enough rich data to be collected for further analysis and coding to generate themes. Further research could be conducted on leadership styles to better understand how leadership strategies help the new generation of workers graduating from high school and college graduates be successful in their professional lives, which may lead to increased retention.

Reflections

The Doctor of Business Administration doctoral study process was extremely demanding but rewarding at the same time. I have been an IT professional for over 20 years, and my professional experience influenced the decision to pursue my study. Early in my career, my focus was getting pay at the highest salary. In time I realized that money was not everything and started pursuing a meaningful job where I knew my efforts would positively help society. Compromising money for meaningful work was good for a short time however pressure for industry demanding workers with IT skills encouraged me to return to a higher salary, but this time I wanted a meaningful job. I found myself working for companies with no culture, no vision, or bad leadership. Changing employers frequently forced me to ask myself what was missing in my previous jobs that I had no problem leaving. Conducting this study helped me better understand the complexities of successfully managing a business and retaining the best employees.

The research process was determined by designing a study based on a real business-problem and then investigating it methodically. During the research process, I read over 100 articles from academic journals on topics including information technology, IT workforce, IT talent, employee turnover, involuntary turnover, voluntary turnover and retention, leadership style, and employee engagement. I discovered that successful managers do not lead by being a boss but rather by acting more like mentors to their employees. Successful managers coach and mentor their employees to determine how they can best help them.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide successful strategies to retain key IT employees that IT business leaders can use to retain their employees by engaging them, building positive relationships, and recognizing and rewarding their employees for all their contributions. Payment is important for all employees; however, there are other factors that influence their decisions to stay or leave the organization beyond financial remuneration. Using the two-factor theory (Herzberg, 1959), IT leaders may increase employee retention by reducing levels of employee dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors associated with dissatisfaction include working conditions, quality of supervision, job security, interpersonal relationships, and company culture. Also, introducing motivation factors such as achievement, job recognition, and autonomy, helps increase interest in the job, advancement, and growth. In conclusion, it is important for business managers to help employees meet their job expectations by creating open and honest communication at all levels of the hierarchy, creating a culture that clearly communicates core values, mission, and vision to be used to elicit specific employees behavior, and by providing avenues to help employees grow and advance through different training methods.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Action	**Script**
Introduce the interview and set the stage	Hello, my name is Nelson Velez, I am currently a graduate student at Walden University pursuing a Doctoral Degree in Business Administration (DBA). I am the researcher the data collection instrument of this study. I like to thank you again for participating in this study as an interviewee who has significant background and expertise in the subject which is “strategies outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent.” The objective of the study is to identify What strategies do outsourcing business executives use to retain key IT employee talent? The interview should take around 60 to 90 minutes. I will record this interview to double check and ensure that I grasp your answers and input completely and accurately. Moreover, after the interview, we will meet again for member checking where you will have the opportunity to review a transcript of your answers to confirm that I enter them correctly. Before our member checking interview, I will e-mail you a copy of your responses to review and prepare for the member checking meeting. Please feel comfortable as you answer the questions during the interviews as there is no wrong or right answer, just answer to the best of your personal experience and knowledge about the subject. I e-mailed you a copy of the informed consent form for your review, do you have any questions regarding the form or any other questions? Please sign the consent form and let us start our interview with the first question.
	Interview Questions
Make sure to do the following	IQ1. Based on your experience, how does IT employee turnover affect company’s service to the client?

while conducting the interview: a. Listen for verbal and non-verbal (body language) cues that could trigger additional essential questions for clarification. b. As and when required, ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth understating. c. Paraphrase as needed	IQ2. What strategies do you use to mitigate voluntary employee turnover of high skilled IT talent pool? IQ3. Which of these strategies helped most to improve employee retention? IQ4. How effective have these strategies been? IQ5. What were the key barriers to implementing your successful strategies for mitigating voluntary turnover among high skilled IT talent pool in your organization? IQ6. How did you address the key barriers to implementing your successful strategies for mitigating voluntary turnover among high skilled IT talent pool in your organization? IQ7. What other information can you share about your successful strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover?
Wrap up the interview. Thank participant	With this, we conclude our questions and interview session for today. Thank you for your time and support and for the valuable information you provided on the subject. Do you have any additional questions or comments on the subject?
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	I would like to schedule the follow-up member checking interview after two weeks from today. The interviews will take between 30 to 60 minutes. When would be a convenient time for you to meet? Once I synthesis your answers to the questions, I will e-mail you an English version of your responses to ensure that I recorded all your answers completely and accurately and to prepare for the member checking interview.

Follow–up Member Checking Interview

Actions	Script
Introduce follow-on (member checking) interview and set the stage	Hello and thank you again for your participation in this follow-on interview. Today, we will go over the interview questions with the synthesis of your responses. Typically, this is one paragraph per question response; in some instances, the response may be slightly less or more. Before we start, do you have any questions or concerns that you like to share? Let us start

Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question	Please open up your copy of the questions and responses from the first interview which I e-mailed you for review. As we move through the questions and responses, I will ask clarification questions to ensure completeness and accuracy of your answers.
Bring in probing questions related to other information that may have been found—information must be related so that probing and adhering to the IRB approval.	1. Based on your experience, how does IT employee turnover affect company's service to the client? 1. Succinct synthesis of response 2. Ask did I miss anything or is there anything you would like to add?
Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask:	2. What strategies do you use to mitigate voluntary employee turnover of high skilled IT talent pool? 1. Succinct synthesis of response 2. Ask did I miss anything or is there anything you would like to add?
Did I miss anything? Or, What would you like to add?	3. Which of these strategies helped most to improve employee retention? 1. Succinct synthesis of response 2. Ask did I miss anything or is there anything you would like to add?
	4. How effective have these strategies been? 1. Succinct synthesis of response 2. Ask did I miss anything or is there anything you would like to add?
	5. What were the key barriers to implementing your successful strategies for mitigating voluntary turnover among high skilled IT talent pool in your organization? 1. Succinct synthesis of response 2. Ask did I miss anything or is there anything you would like to add? 6.How did you address the key barriers to implementing your successful strategies for mitigating voluntary turnover among high skilled IT talent pool in your organization? 1. Succinct synthesis of response 2. Ask did I miss anything or is there anything you would like to add? 7.What other information can you share about your successful strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover?

	1. Succinct synthesis of response 2. Ask did I miss anything or is there anything you would like to add?
	Thank you for your time and support of the study. Do you have any additional questions or comments? I will send you a copy of the transcript of this interview and the research once completed. I like to ask you if I may reach out to you if I need any clarification in the future. Again, thank you for your participation, please contact me if you have any questions.